

Recipe for a ripe old age:



fruit and vegetables,



exercise,  no smoking

- Healthy lifestyle can add a decade to life expectancy
- Study shows even old adults can benefit from change

Sarah Boseley, Health Editor
Wednesday April 26, 2006
[The Guardian](#) (U.K.)

It's a simple recipe, but it could add 11 years to your life, possibly more.

A study by Cambridge University on behalf of the Department of Health has calculated the formula for longevity: Giving up smoking means an extra five years, moderate exercise three more. Add to that another three by eating five portions of fruit and vegetables a day. For couch potatoes, a pear a day could make a difference too.

The figures were derived from research conducted into the lifestyle and life expectancy of more than 25,000 people aged 45 to 79 in Norfolk. It showed that the most determined of us could boost our longevity by more than a decade through cleaning up our act.

Even the gym-shy could gain an extra two years of life over others of the same age by munching an apple or pear every day in addition to their usual diet, the research shows.

The study marks the first time where real gains in health from eating well and taking exercise - or even just standing up rather than sitting down - have been quantified. To mark the occasion, Tony Blair and the public health minister, Caroline Flint, launched a new campaign called *Small Change, Big Difference*, slipping into trainers and joggers to show the nation the way to greater youthfulness.

Kay-Tee Khaw, of the clinical gerontology unit at Cambridge University's school of clinical medicine at Addenbrooke's Hospital, who is leading the continuing research, said it was never too late to make some improvement.

However small the lifestyle change, it could save years of life. "Every little bit of additional activity has a measurable impact on health," she said. "If totally inactive people move towards becoming moderately inactive, that is associated with a 15-20% lower mortality."

How active you have to be in your leisure time depends on your job. A sedentary office worker needs an hour's exercise a day to turn back the clock by three years. A hairdresser or shop assistant, standing all day, needs only 30 minutes' exercise to achieve the same benefit. A plumber, cleaner, nurse, bricklayer or construction worker needs no extra exercise because of the physical work involved in their job.

Recipe for a ripe old age:



Small changes in diet also make a measurable difference. Eating five portions of fruit and vegetables a day will give you the maximum benefit, but even moving from none to one portion a day, or from two to three will improve your life expectancy by two years, the research shows.

Mr. Blair said the campaign would not only change people's own lives but was also good for society as a whole. **"It is really about how small changes to lifestyle can make a big difference to personal health and the chances of living longer,"** he said at the YMCA in central London, dressed in navy blue Nike tracksuit and trainers and clutching a bottle of water, "What the research shows is if you take a bit more exercise, so you're doing something, you pay attention to your diet, it actually makes a big difference to the way that your own personal health is and actually how you feel."

The prime minister revealed earlier that he worked out at the Downing Street gym around three or four times a week, which helped relieve the stress of his job. He later told journalists: "I actually take a lot of exercise now and I make time for it, I think it is important."

Mr. Blair said he ate more fruit and vegetables than he used to, and was trying to drink more water. He appealed to others to make such small changes, such as taking the stairs rather than the lift.

Earlier in the day Mr. Blair and the embattled health secretary, Patricia Hewitt, shared breakfast with a collection of companies and organizations that No. 10 scribed as stakeholders in the initiative: Sainsbury's, Boots, Sport England, Unilever, Cancer Research UK, PruHealth, Business in Sport and Leisure, Groundwork and the British Heart Foundation.

All had a track record of promoting the health and well-being of their customers. But the government did not want to preach to people. **"This is about providing people with information so they can make choices for themselves,"** she said.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/medicine/story/0,,1761399,00.html>